

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSK #0036/01 0171349
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 171349Z JAN 06
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3612
INFO RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS 3501
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 3159
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 3080
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3279
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA 1520
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0828
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS MINSK 000036

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: Minsk Election Weekly IV (January 6-January 16)

¶1. This is the fourth in a weekly series of election-oriented reports, providing brief items of interest related to the March 19, 2006 presidential elections.

Signature Collection

¶2. Lukashenko Leads in Signature Collections; Other Meets Minimum Requirement

The following are the latest numbers of collected signatures as reported by independent news source Belapan. [Note: Each candidate needs 100,000 signatures to run in the presidential election.]

Candidate	Number of Signatures	Date Reported
¶A. Lukashenko	993,000	January 11
¶A. Milinkevich	140,000	January 16
¶S. Gaidukevich	124,000	January 16
¶A. Kozulin	100,000	January 12
¶V. Frolov	60,000	January 16
¶Z. Poznyak	40,000	January 11
¶S. Skrebets	35,000	January 12

Despite already meeting the 100,000 signature requirement, both Kozulin and Milinkevich's campaign teams vow not to stop collecting signatures until they have several hundred thousand signatures.

¶3. To Make the Grade, Sign for Luka!

On January 6, human rights NGO "Charter 97" received letters from students at Belarusian State University describing instances where university officials strongly encouraged students to sign nomination forms in support of Lukashenko before they were allowed to take their exams. Students were not required to present their passports as proof of citizenship because the dean's office has all students' personal data. On January 9, human rights NGO "Vyasna" reported similar occurrences at the private Belarusian Institute for Legal Science. University officials interrupted an exam to announce that if the students want to receive good marks, they must sign nomination forms in support of Lukashenko. Post has separately heard this from several students as well.

¶4. Signature Collectors Barred from Passageways, Dormitories

On January 5, signature collectors from presidential hopeful Zenon Poznyak claimed that they were chased out of underground passageways by police and barred from entering student dormitories. The signature collectors claimed the police cited a law banning collection of signatures in underground passageways, but never produced a copy of the law. According to a statement by Central Election Commission secretary Nikolai Lozovik, collectors may gather signatures anywhere unless it obstructs the work of businesses or organizations. Lozovik promised to handle any complaints received from collectors within twenty-four hours, but encouraged signature collectors to obtain permits from the authorities for signature gathering in order to avoid problems in the future.

The Campaigns

15. Voitovich Drops Out of the Presidential Race

On January 9, independent presidential hopeful Alexander Voitovich withdrew from the presidential election race. Voitovich accused Lukashenko of deceiving the people and stated, "the entire election campaign is being conducted to give the impression of the legality of the third term for President Lukashenko....I don't want to enable the creation of [that] illusion for the electorate." Voitovich also described unfair campaign practices committed by Lukashenko including closing independent media sources and denying opposition candidates access to state-run media.

16. Opposition Leaders Encourage Use of "Popular Vote" Tactic to Reveal Election Fraud

On January 11, former presidential candidate Aleksandr Voitovich endorsed presidential hopeful Zenon Poznyak's idea of using a "popular vote" to reveal vote rigging. The plan encourages opposition voters to submit a fake ballot on election day with their chosen candidate's name written on it and to take the original ballot with them. The opposition voters should then fill out the original ballots and submit them to an independent agency who will then accurately reveal the number of votes for the opposition members. [Note: Removing the original ballot on election day means that actual votes for the opposition will not be included in the GOB's elections results, which will further skew the voting results further towards a Lukashenko victory. Likewise, only pro-opposition voters would participate, making it useless as a means of verifying the official vote.]

17. Election Officials Warn Poznyak's Nomination Group

On January 12, the Central Election Commission (CEC) issued an official warning to Poznyak's nomination group for violating "early campaigning" laws. The CEC cited the distribution of campaign leaflets by signature collectors as the basis for the warning. Poznyak protested the warning, claiming that the leaflets detailed Poznyak's proposal against vote rigging and not campaign information about the candidate.

18. MoD Explains Electoral Process to Servicemen

On January 6, Minister of Defense Leonid Maltsev ordered the creation of a working group to support the electoral process and to increase awareness about the presidential campaign among members of the Armed Forces. The group will ensure the integrity of servicemen's voting practices as well as explain voting rights and the electoral code to members of the armed services and their family members.

19. Skrebets' Nomination Group Denied Access to Candidate

On January 5, the Supreme Court denied Sergey Galagonyuk, the head of Sergey Skrebets' campaign team, access to meet the imprisoned opposition leader in person or talk to him over the phone. [Note: Skrebets has been in jail since May for charges of bribery, fraud and "illegal business activities."] According to Belarusian law, only relatives and lawyers may

talk with people held in custody. Galagonyuk plans to appeal to Lukashenko for help.

Harassment

¶10. Police Seize 10,000 Milinkevich Calendars

On January 6, police seized 10,800 small calendars with 10+ Coalition candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's picture on them from Belarusian Communist Party activist Valery Rybchenko in the Gomel region. Police stopped Rybchenko's car and took the calendars, claiming that the calendars did not have the proper publication data printed on them. Rybchenko claimed that the search was illegal. Two weeks earlier, police from the same area seized 57,000 holiday cards signed by Milinkevich.

¶11. Milinkevich's Team Faces Threats and Searches

On January 6, police searched Milinkevich nomination team member Vladimir Hundar's apartment in Baranovichy and confiscated computer equipment they claim is connected to a criminal case from 2000 involving Hundar. On January 12, Milinkevich's campaign manager Sergei Kalyakin estimated that approximately 60 percent of the group's members have already been questioned by authorities or threatened with dismissal or expulsion from their educational institutions if they continue to collect signatures. Kalyakin reported that already 40 people have resigned their membership. Conversely on the same day, pro-Lukashenko presidential hopeful Sergey Gaidukevich announced that his signature collection process was proceeding smoothly and without serious interference or violations by the authorities.

¶12. Kozulin's Campaign Team Reports Numerous Problems

On January 11, Kozulin's nomination group filed another complaint with the Central Election Commission. The complaint alleges that the deputy head of the Slutsk city government pressured a collector to quit when the collector submitted signatures for verification. The complaint also described instances where employees at government run kindergartens were threatened with dismissal if they did not sign a nomination form in support of Lukashenko. Kozulin's group claims that they have been denied access to student dormitories. Separately on January 12, the Brobruisk chapter of Kozulin's Social Democratic Party "Hramada" (BSDP) lost its office after state authorities cancelled the lease due to dangerous floor conditions. The leasing authorities refused to rent BSDP another room in the building.

Quote of the Week

¶13. The following is a brief exchange on January 11 between deputy head of the presidential administration, Natalia Petkevich, and a journalist after Petkevich explained the reasons behind the resignation of Victor Sheiman:

Petkevich: "After the elections, Victor Sheiman will return to government work and resume an active role as the secretary of the Security Council."

Voice from the audience: "Are you sure that he [Sheiman] will want to work for Aleksandr Milinkevich?"

KROL